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Reevaluating the Current NCO Education System

Flexibility, adaptability, modernization. These are the buzzwords of today's Army and Armor Force. They are also the cornerstones of an effective Armor team in light of the ever-changing environment in which the force operates. Without change, there is stagnation. Failure to perceive the need for change leads to a force incapable of meeting the multiple demands required for mission success. In response to recent demands, leaders within the Armor community are reevaluating the current Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) and examining how courses might be redesigned to better train our Armor non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and particularly those NCOs whose leadership is essential to crew-, section-, and platoon-level mission success.

There are four progressive training tiers within the NCOES: the Primary Leadership Development Course (PLDC), the Basic Noncommissioned Officers Course (BNCOC), the Advanced Noncommissioned Officers Course (ANCOC), and the United States Army Sergeants Major Course (USASMC). The PLDC and USASMC provide branch-immaterial training to meet the needs of the entry-level NCO and senior NCO, respectively. For career-specific training, BNCOC and ANCOC provide basic and advanced leader and tactical skills necessary for developing superior Armor NCOs.

Ongoing combat and sustainment missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the deployment and redeployment of units to multiple theaters, indicate the need for a revitalized NCOES, and in particular for a BNCOC and an ANCOC that meet leader and tactical training requirements for the individual sergeant and the section or platoon he will lead. The Fort Knox Noncommissioned Offi-

cers' Academy (NCOA) is currently exploring several initiatives that will help meet these new challenges. There are two primary focus areas: updated course structure and preparation for student surges.

Quality training is essential for successful BNCOC and ANCOC graduates, no matter what the length of the course. NCOA is examining a streamlined course structure in BNCOC and ANCOC that will incorporate unit-level training for specific tasks such as Tank and Bradley Gunnery Skills Tests. This will serve two purposes. First, it will allow training time at Fort Knox to become more focused on the modern battlefield, including urban combat, stability and support, and digital battlefield operations.

Additionally, the streamlined course structure will minimize an NCO's time away from his unit, enhancing the ability to build a cohesive, stable force. Student preparation at the unit will remain paramount to successful course completion.

One key component of the updated courses includes incorporating Force XXI Battle Command Brigade and Below (FBCB2) training beginning in October 2004 for both BNCOC and ANCOC students.

In addition to updating BNCOC and ANCOC courses to meet the needs of the Armor force, leaders at the NCOA are also preparing for student surges that will result from units returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The goal is to train soldiers who were unable to attend or complete an NCOES course due to deployment. This effort will keep soldiers competitive with their peers, and aid in continuing unit preparedness with well-trained and quali-

fied leaders. Division chiefs in BNCOC and ANCOC are working with Armor community leaders and course instructors to develop workable systems that will allow the academy to handle twice the normal student load, without losing the quality of education and leadership currently promoted throughout the academy. As part of surge readiness, mobile training teams (MTTs) are prepared to travel to Armor installations to train soldiers locally. Local courses would be fast-paced to accomplish training goals within a shorter time frame, minimizing the impact on the unit while maintaining the integrity of course material. Installation support for resources will be essential to the success of these MTTs.

Central to the NCOA's goals of revitalizing Armor BNCOC and ANCOC courses is the desire to provide leader and tactical training that is flexible, adaptive, and modern — essential ingredients to a successful Armor force. Within this framework, the NCOA will continue to produce an Armor NCO corps that is prepared to lead scouts and tankers on today's modern battlefield and is poised to lead the way for future force modernization.

I had an opportunity to visit Command Sergeant Major Richard Hernandez and his impressive soldiers at the 1st Cavalry Division, III Corps, Fort Hood, Texas. I enjoyed visiting with these soldiers and compliment their professionalism and drive to lead by example.

I wish to extend a special thanks to our own First Sergeant Noe, BNCOC Division Chief; keep raising the standard!

Iron Discipline and Standards!